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Melbourne's Community Gardens: Harvesting More Than Just Vegetables

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S.I.T. Study Abroad Program
Byron Bay/Lismore, Australia
August to December, 2005

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Academic Director: Peter Brennan

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Abstract

Research on community gardens is an increasingly important area of study. As the percentage of the global population living in cities continues to climb, community gardens have the ability to reach increasing numbers of people. Previous research has shown that these spaces allocated for the growing of vegetables, flowers, fruit and/or herbs, produce many outcomes reaching beyond their members and into the surrounding environment. Studies indicate that this localized method of food production is able to reduce food costs for those involved, serve as an educational tool and provide a platform for community building, socialization, neighborhood renewal, and environmental remediation. Forming in early twentieth century Britain, community gardens emerged on a global scale following WWII and first appeared in Melbourne, Australia in 1977. Today, there are fifty community gardens in Melbourne. In an effort to accomplish my study goal, conducting case studies of community gardens in Melbourne, this research paper focuses on four such gardens.

The aims of this study: *to learn about different community gardens, including how and why they became what they are today, to understand the people who garden and gain insight into their motivations, and to discover the many outcomes of their participation*, have been undertaken in an effort to provide an increased awareness of community gardens. A combination of data collection methods proved to be the best way to reach these aims. I conducted informal and formal interviews, was a detached observer and at times participated and worked in the gardens.

Results reveal that there are a wide range of community gardens and people who spend time in them. The community gardens under study have a range of objectives, management styles, physical layouts and plot structures, and have varying levels of member satisfaction and involvement. Gardeners have several reasons for their participation and the outcomes of their contributions are numerous. An analysis shows that each community garden creates feelings and impressions which are very unique to that specific space. A garden's management also greatly contributes to its perceived effectiveness. Community gardens provide educational, personal, communal, and environmental benefits and can be sites of minimal negativity or conflict. Overall, if a community garden is to thrive it must be an unlocked area open to the public with a variety of communal areas and easily manageable plots, which, managed by a volunteer committee, betters the environment, is always improving, and constantly works to satisfy its members. A successful community garden has the potential to reach out to many people and make a valuable contribution to the urban landscape.

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List of Abbreviations:

CBD: Central business District
NCG: Nunawading Community Gardens
DHS: Department of Human Services
CGSW: Community Gardens Support Worker

Definition of Terms:

Community gardens- “organized initiatives where by sections of land are used to produce food or flowers in an urban environment for the personal use or collective benefit of their members, who, by virtue of their participation, share certain resources, such as space, tools, and water” (Glover 2003 p. 264).

Organic- A term used to describe products which are grown and processed without the use of synthetic chemicals or fertilizers (Biological Farmers of Australia 2005).

Compost- “The product of the biological decomposition of organic wastes under the correct conditions” (Jennings et al. 1995 p. 23). After being chopped up it is added to the soil in gardens to act as a natural fertiliser composed of green waste, as is the case with community gardens.

Working Bee- A scheduled time when members of a community garden volunteer their efforts to fixing and maintaining the communal areas of the space. They are generally held at regular intervals and often have a barbeque or social activity following the completion of the tasks (Rob Taylor 2005, *Personal Communication*).

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Community Gardens: The Background and the Basics

The overarching goal of community gardens is to involve the public in aspects of food production (Bartolomei et al. 2003). According to Australia's Community Gardens Network (2005) community gardens come in all shapes and sizes and involve people from all walks of life. Community Gardens may be open to all members of a designated region and managed by a volunteer committee while others are run a local council or governmental body and are available to a specific segment of the population. Some gardens have a single plot shared by all participants while others have individual members who buy or rent and maintain a designated plot. Generally community gardens are no more than two acres in size and may have anywhere from fifteen to one hundred-fifty plots (Tomazin 2003). For the remainder of this paper I will use the word plot to describe "a small area of planted ground" that is used by its owner to grow plants including fruits, vegetables, herbs, and/or flowers and a plot holder, member, or gardener to refer to the individuals who have plots at the community gardens (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary 2005).

The British allotment system of the early twentieth century popularized the concept of community gardens as a means for recreation and to escape from increasing industrialization (Eliott 1983). According to Crabtree (1999) the number of such gardens grew enormously following the use of British and American victory gardens during World War II and soon emerged on a global scale. This was due, in part, to a growing concern for neighbourhood revitalization and activism (Bartolomei 2003). It allowed for the public to have a sense of ownership and a direct connection with nature in an increasingly urbanised and privatised landscape (Francis & Hester 1990).

According to Margaret Rackham (2002) Community gardening began in Australia during the mid-1970s in the city of Nunawading. In 1977 Nunawading Community Garden Cooperative set the stage for Australia's community gardening movement. It was used as a model to create gardens all across Australia. At present, there are more than 600 community gardens in Australia, a number that continues to climb with an increasing awareness of their many benefits to the community.

1.2 Previous Research

Research has shown that community gardens play an important role in enhancing the lives of those involved (Francis & Hester Jr. 1990). One of the first case studies of community gardens in this part of the world was Christine Elliot's work in 1983. She focused on Melbourne's then thirteen community gardens and compiled her findings in a book entitled *Growing in the City- Employment and Recreation in Australian City Farms and Community Gardens*. She concluded that these gardens are a valuable low-cost use of vacant/under-utilised space and provide residents the opportunity to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility over a specific space.

Her particular study did not investigate many other aspects of gardening; such as why residents chose to participate and the motivation for their continual involvement as well as the role community gardens in the improvement of the natural environment. I hope that my study on Melbourne's community gardens is able to clarify some of the points left out of Elliott's initial study and will lead to an understanding of the area's community gardens on a deeper level.

A Bountiful Harvest: Community Gardens and Neighbourhood Renewal in Waterloo by Bartolomei et al. (2003) summarizes the benefits as well as drawbacks of these spaces. Their investigation claimed that community gardens reduce the plot-holders' food costs, allow for increased social interaction and serve as platforms for community development, environmental remediation and neighbourhood renewal. Minor conflicts in the gardens emerged mainly due to misunderstandings, cultural conflicts, and arguments over boundaries and leadership. Good management was placed as one of the most significant indicators of a successful garden. Overall, the authors of this study determined that community gardens are "simple ways to achieve social, environmental, and economic benefits" (Bartolomei et al. 2003 p.27).

One of the primary benefits recognized in community gardens is their ability to serve as an educational platform (Bartolomei et al. 2003, Elliott 1983, Finnane 2005). Finnane (2005) reports that they are able to educate, either formally or informally, the public on aspects of food production, organic gardening, cooperation, and general issues of responsibility. Children can learn from older generations as traditional and cultural experiences are passed on in the garden.

Many of the advantages recognized in *Lawns into Lunch: Growing Food in the City* by Jill Finnane (2005) are related to bringing food production back to the

local level. It decreases the reliance on a global system of conventional agriculture which greatly exploits the world's resources. In addition, community gardens are shown to improve the overall environmental condition of the surrounding communities. They are effective ways to transform waste into usable matter and their often close proximity to plot holders' residences allows for their access by foot or bicycle.

In addition, the concept of organic agriculture is recognized as one of the guiding principles behind community gardening (Crabtree 1999). Gardening with these organic methods has been shown to have many benefits including; an increase in a product's nutrient and vitamin levels along with a decrease in environmental pollution and land degradation (Biological Farmers of Australia 2005). Rather than relying on chemical fertilizers and pollutants to combat problems, organic food production focuses on natural and biological methods of pest management (Forrest 2005). Community Gardens focus on this and other environmental issues such as water conservation and composting to reduce their impact on the natural environment (Rackham 2005). The combination of these previous findings helped provide a basis for the development of my study as I too hoped to conduct case studies of community gardens to determine all these spaces have to offer.

1.3 Statement of Problem and Justification:

The overarching study goal for this research project is to conduct case studies of community gardens in Melbourne, Australia. In light of today's increasing urbanization, research on community gardens is an increasingly important area of study. By the year 1980 more than 70% of Australians lived in cities, a figure that continues to climb at an astonishing rate (Newland 1980). In 2000 more than 50% of the global population resided in cities and consumed more than three quarters of the world's resources (Finnane 2005). Consuming locally produced food minimizes the energy used for its transportation and production, a figure that currently accounts for thirteen percent of Australia's total energy use. By cutting down on this number, community gardens help to reduce a city's consumption of resources (Finnane 2005). However, cities are generally viewed as industrial spaces focusing mainly on the built environment and are not regarded as spaces of food production (Crabtree 1999). These perceptions, along with their ability to serve a rapidly expanding audience, both in Australia and on a global scale, create a greater need for the awareness of community gardens.

I decided to focus specifically on Melbourne because of its high number and diversity of community gardens and rapidly growing population. In the 2003-2004 financial year Melbourne's population grew by 1.3 percent leaving the city with 3.6 million inhabitants (Colebatch and Marino 2005). Melbourne is home to more than fifty community gardens, providing me the opportunity to gain the most comprehensive understanding of community gardening in Australia (Tomazin 2003).

1.4 Aims of Study

This study aims to create provide the reader with a broader awareness of community gardens, in hopes to motivate more people to participate in community gardening. More specifically, I undertook this study to learn about the different types of community gardens and people who garden in them. I wanted to gain an understanding and insight into what motivates individuals to garden as well as to discover the many outcomes of community gardens. I did not dedicate my time to this project to simply create a database of statistics and figures, but rather devoted myself to learning about all the things these unique spaces have to offer to their members and the surrounding urban and suburban landscapes.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Choosing the Gardens

To accomplish my study goal and fulfil the aims of this study in the time allotted I chose to concentrate on four specific community gardens in Melbourne. I felt that focusing on this number, rather than gaining a brief overview of as many gardens as possible, would lead to the most reliable outcomes. Conducting case studies of specific community gardens was the best way to achieve these aims and to understand community gardens as whole. I researched the background of Melbourne's community gardens and picked sites with different outward characteristics, such as location, size, and management of site that would hopefully lead to the most comprehensive set of results (See Appendix A for a map and directory of Melbourne's community gardens). The gardens I chose to conduct case studies of are:

- Veg Out Community Gardens St. Kilda, Inc. is located in the City of Port Philip, an inner-suburb, approximately four kilometres from the Central Business District (CBD). It was established in 1998 with an on-site arts centre, 140 plots and is managed by a volunteer committee of gardeners (Veg Out Community Gardens St. Kilda Inc. 2005)

- CERES Community Gardens in East Brunswick (two kilometres from the CBD) is part of a larger organization, CERES Community Environment Park. Its fifty plots are more than twenty years old and are managed by a volunteer community gardens coordinator (Paula Havelberg 2005 *Personal Communication*).
- Nunawading Community Gardens Inc., located in the City of Whitehorse, an outer-suburb of Melbourne, has 127 plots at its primary location with 42 at another across town. Established in 1977, it is run by a garden committee (Rackham 2002).
- Flemington Estate Community Garden in the City of Melbourne has recently re-opened after closing for renovations with 120 plots. It is located on a public housing estate and managed by a community gardens support worker (CGSW) from the non-profit organization, Cultivating Community and funded by the Department of Human Services, Office of Housing (Cultivating Community, The Green Map 2003).

2.2 Data Collection

After contacting members at each of these gardens I paid an initial visit to familiarize them with my project and to establish a schedule for future research. I collected my data over a three-week period beginning the 30th of October and continuing until November 23rd, dividing my time up amongst the four gardens.

I used several different methods of data collection, as each was necessary to gain a well-rounded understanding of the community gardens under study. A majority of the insight I gained through the course of this study was from informal interviews conducted with the community gardeners themselves. I began with the intent of doing more formal and scheduled interviews, but quickly learned that people would be more willing to share their knowledge if I approached them in a casual and relaxed manner. I would speak to them with key questions in my head and would try to lead the conversation in such a way as to answer those inquiries. Often times I would interact with the same person several times during the research period, forming a bond and network of trust allowing me to learn more about the gardens' significance than would have otherwise been possible. Immediately upon concluding each interaction I sat down with my work journal to recount the previous events to the best of my memory. I wrote down everything I could remember and made notes of anything else I wanted to speak to that person about in the future.

Some of the individuals I spoke with were happy to share their knowledge, if they could remain anonymous. To ensure the protection of these people, I will only refer to them as plot holders or gardeners. For the rest whose names have been

provided, I will cite them using their first and/or last names in standard author-date citation to guarantee that credit is given to their thoughts.

Alternatively, I conducted formal interviews when I felt that informal ones were insufficient. These interviews were necessary to gain background information on several of the selected gardens and to learn more from those in charge in the establishment and on-going management of the sites. In addition, I also spoke with a couple gardeners over the phone when I was unable to meet with them in person. The individuals formally interviewed were; CERES Community Gardens' Coordinator, Paula Havelberg, and Bruce Hannan, and Mary Tarento of Nunawading Community Gardens. I feel that both types of interviews would be better than surveying those involved or asking them to complete a questionnaire because the one-on-one interactions and open-ended questions allowed the interviewees to fully express themselves (See Appendix B for a list of Interview Questions).

In addition, each time I visited the gardens I would observe the surrounding activities and environment without structuring my notes in advance. This way I could record exactly what was going on around me and take notes on what was important. In these instances I did not interact with those around me but maintained my status as a detached observer. This was a valuable tool because there were plot holders at all of the gardens with a very limited ability to speak English. I could see what the gardeners were doing without actually speaking with or to them.

However, there were also times when I would participate in activities with the gardeners or those who managed the facilities. I did whatever they were doing at the time, which included everything from weeding to having a picnic in a shady spot. I found this to be the best way to put myself in the shoes of a community gardener. From that angle I could truly experience and understand the gardens under study. If I had left this component out of my methodology I feel that I would not have succeeded in conducting the best possible case study.

As an additional way to gather more formal and statistical information, I also requested written documentation from each of the community gardens. I asked for contracts, historical information, maps, and newsletters published by the different gardens, which I would later use to help with my analysis.

Combining these methods of data collection was greatly beneficial to reaching the aims of my study. They allowed for me to create the most thorough set of results for the reader to best understand these community gardens. There were times when

conducting a study in such a manner made it impossible to predict what sort of information would present itself and how I would analyze it. For example, there were a couple days when, due to the rainy weather, I was not able to visit the gardens. No one would be there to talk with and there would not have been any way for me to participate. I tried to overcome this obstacle by resorting to gathering research in alternative ways, such as with the phone interviews or by reviewing past visits to the gardens. In addition, I found it difficult to rely on plot holders and garden management to provide me with written documentation. Much of this information was only available to me on request and there were times when the people I asked to get the information for me were unable to follow through. This limited the amount of data collected for certain aspects of the gardens.

2.3 Data Analysis

To analyze all my research I first looked back on my notes to review what the gardeners had told me about their experiences. I then tried to correlate that with another piece of information, such as how someone's negative feelings towards some aspect of the garden could be caused by its management strategy or tensions between gardeners. I also thought a lot about my personal experiences in each particular garden, either observing or participating, and how they made me feel about the gardens as a whole. I wanted to see why I felt how I did and what it is that brings out those results. To conclude my study I determined what I think creates the most successful community garden and methods for making this possible.

2.4 Potential Biases

Having explained the methodology, I will leave you with a bit of insight into the body of my paper. Spending a substantial amount of time at each of the four gardens and speaking with stakeholders involved, I found it difficult to maintain impartiality. There were people and gardens with whom I felt a deep connection and found myself wanting to spend more time with them than was possible for a four-week research project. I also developed slight biases towards particular gardens as well as specific areas within them because of the way they made feel. In addition, the gardeners willing to contribute to my study were often those more involved in the gardens than those who were not unavailable. This potentially limited the range of perspectives available in the results. Having said this, I do my best to present the results in an objective manner. When an opinion is given, I clearly state that it is my own view. I first present basic information about each of the gardens using a chart for

easy comparison and then into further and more qualitative detail about the particular locations under study.

3.0 Results

3.1 Basic Information about the Gardens

This table is a compilation of data gathered through informal interviews and observation at each of the four community gardens under study. It shows the most basic information about each of these gardens. To clarify some of the table's headings, the 'activities' column explains the activities sponsored by the gardens and available to their members, 'facilities' shows the items and resources available at the gardens for the use of their members, and 'included in membership' details what is available to members and plot holders upon payment of fees.

Name	Number and Size of Plots	Cost of Plot	Included in Membership	# on Waiting List and Expected Wait	Activities	Facilities
Veg Out Community Gardens St. Kilda Inc.	145 Plots of appx. 1.5x3m	\$15 Annually plus \$4 per square meter every 6 months	Maintenance of garden, use of tools, hoses, paint, mulch, straw, care of animals and communal areas	50 people with 3-4 years to wait for a plot	Monthly working bees and farmers market, BBQs, open day, fundraising events	BBQ, kitchenette, fire place, chook house, rabbit hut, birds, communal cactus gardens, fruit trees, grapes, sandbox, benches, tables, compost bin, kitchen and seating area
CERES Community Gardens	50 plots of appx. 2.5x3m	\$60 annually	CERES membership, use of minimal tools, shed, discount to nursery and café, newsletter	100 people- 8 years (the list has closed)	Biannual working bees and BBQs	Shed
Nunawading Community Gardens	127 plots of appx. 3x4m	\$3 membership plus \$17 annual fee	Access to shed, minimal tools, BBQ, newsletter	28 people with a 1-2 year wait	Seasonal working bees & BBQs, meetings w/ speakers & field trips	Shed, sheltered picnic area, BBQ, communal areas along fences
Flemington Estate Community Garden	124 plots Of appx. 2.2x4m	\$18 annually	Forms a garden fund for communal tools, hoses, bbqs, workshops, and activities for gardeners	No waiting list	Plan to hold workshops, working bees, bbqs, meetings, a seed swap	Chook house, sandbox, communal plots, sheltered picnic area, 45000l water tank, various benches, 4 compost bins, 2 sinks

Figure 1. Table of Findings

3.2 Rules and Regulations

The plot holders at each of the gardens must adhere to a set of standards set forth by the governing body of each organization. These address many issues including; organic methods of growing, maintenance of plots and communal areas, respect and concern for other plot holders. For a complete description of the rules at each garden see Appendices C, D, E, & F.

I witnessed people who were not following rules set forth by their respective gardens. For example, at CERES, Nunawading, and Flemington people used chemicals to kill snails that had invaded their gardens. At CERES weeds had overtaken the pathways and fences around the plots, a responsibility neglected by the plot holders. All four of the gardens had individuals who failed to comply with the general maintenance required of plot holders. Those who did abide by the rules of their gardens expressed their frustrations towards those who did not.

3.3 Veg Out Community Gardens St. Kilda Inc.

3.3.1 Layout of Veg Out Community Gardens

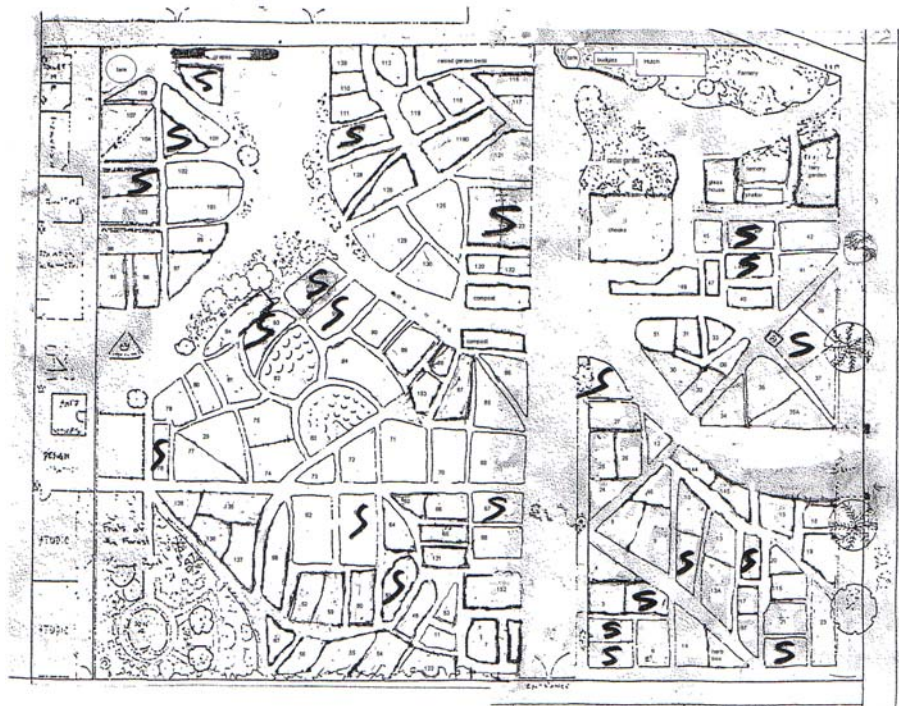


Figure 2. Diagram of Veg Out Community Gardens St. Kilda

This diagram shows Veg Out's physical layout. It was provided courtesy of Veg Out Community Gardens St. Kilda. The S represents a plot with a sculpture

within the boundaries of a plot. The individual plots are numbered and the communal spaces labelled. Other open areas are filled with grass or wood chips. Along the left hand side are the artists' studios and along the bottom are the kitchen facilities and seating area.

3.3.2 A Background

Veg Out's charter is "To support a unique, safe, and supportive haven within the City of Port Philip. To promote a sense of community where trust, effort, knowledge, skills and responsibility are shared; where creativity, quality, and the environment are nurtured; and where equity and philanthropy can flourish" (Veg Out Community Gardens St. Kilda 2005 p. 2). As one gardener sees it, "we are working to build a better future through community gardens." The Friends of Veg Out (a term used to describe members of Veg Out) use it to help the community at large, through their fundraising efforts at the inclusion of the public and to create a better image of the city. They have a partnership with SouthEast water to promote environmental education in hopes of decreasing water consumption in the gardens and surrounding community (Tomazin 2003). The members often spoke to me about their eagerness to constantly improve this space for the enjoyment of everyone. They think that its ability to build community and grow vegetables makes Veg Out the unique and amazing space it is to them. The general feeling expressed by members of Veg Out is that they could not be more grateful to have this land available as a place of relaxation and recreation and a break from the hustle and bustle of every day life.

3.3.3 A Look Around

To walk around Veg Out on an average spring day is to see a wide range of people and plants. There are always kids playing in the sandbox and with the rabbits, people taking pictures of the plots and sculptures, plot holders watering their gardens or socializing with another member. Smiles and happy conversation are a common sight, along with picnics in the grass and the exchange of vegetables and good conversation. The garden is open to the public during daylight hours, so more often than not there are more people enjoying this space than just those who pay to be a 'Friend.' Members often spent time watching the world go by sitting on one of the colourful benches. Signs and posters are numerous, telling gardeners how to compost and to only water their gardens before 9am and after 3pm (see Figure 3). Beyond the boundaries of Veg Out the city is filled with typical hubbub and commotion, with parking lots, busy streets, and even an amusement park.



Figure 3. Image of Veg Out's Composting Station

3.3.4 The Plots

There are 145 plots available for the residents of the City of Port Philip, with ten of them reserved for local community groups, such as single mothers, people living with AIDS, and aboriginal organizations. The plots are not allocated based on length of time on the waiting list, but they are distributed using merit-based system. To have a plot, you must prove that you will be a responsible caretaker. People are able to do this at monthly working bees or by unofficially taking care of the communal areas, such as the cactus garden, or Fruits of the Forest (an area dedicated to growing various types of fruit trees). Individuals were satisfied with this method of plot distribution, as the most dedicated members are the lucky ones with the plots.

However, for many of the people, being part of Veg Out isn't even so much about having a plot but about feeling a part of something bigger than themselves (Rob Taylor 2005 *Personal Communication*). There are 'Friends' who do not want to be on the waiting list but who enjoy the company of everyone at Veg Out. These individuals are just as interested in working for Veg Out as those who have a plot to call their own.

A majority of the members express that the unique physical characteristics of the plots reflect the diverse personalities and opinions of all the people it serves. Some of the people use their plots to grow vegetables for their families while others grow flowers and herbs. Many of the plots are decorated with sculptures and various

nick-knacks that gardeners had found on the side of the road and given a new home in their plot. This includes everything from a broken wheelbarrow to a glass bowl with goldfish and a plot that has been transformed into a mountain (see figure 4). The plots are not of a uniform size as some are shaped like a tear-drop and it is sometimes difficult to see the boundaries between two adjacent plots as fences are not allowed.



Figure 4. Image of plot with broken wheel barrow

3.3.5 The People Behind the Plots:

The people at Veg Out, both plot holders and ‘Friends’ were a diverse group of individuals who expressed several reasons for joining and even more reasons for staying. Most of the people I met had at least some previous gardening experience, although the extent to their knowledge varied greatly. Approximately half of the gardeners are native Australians with the rest coming of mostly European background, almost all of whom speak English. The members and their families come in all ages, shapes, and sizes, with the oldest plot holder being 92. They even have a few “Veg Out Babies” or kids whose parents met at the garden. Most of these people would do anything they could help another member or volunteer at the activities. There were, however, some people I saw who kept to themselves and did not appear to promote the aims and objectives of their gardens, nor were they interested in helping a college student with her research project. Instead, these people walked by without so much as a smile or a wave.

Lenny, a native Italian and unofficial caretaker of the chooks grew up on a farm and has been gardening ever since he can remember. He spends several hours a

day working on his plot and volunteering his time and sharing his knowledge with those around him. Lenny continues to learn new and improved methods of growing from those around him. When asked his reasons for being such an active member of Veg Out, he says to look around at all the wonderful things this place has done for its members (Lenny 2005 *Personal Communication*).

On the other hand, Shane who is new to gardening says that his whole life has changed since he joined Veg Out last year. He never had any interests in growing vegetables but walked the garden one day and was amazed by the surroundings. In addition learning more with each day spent at Veg out, Shane uses this garden as a way to socialise and meet new and interesting people. It has helped him realize all the beauty in the world. Not only does Shane come to water his plants, but he spends hours each day sitting in his designated spot watching other people enjoy this space (Shane Ryan 2005 *Personal Communication*).

When I spoke with the President, Rob Taylor (2005) in several informal interviews, he kept mentioning how amazing everyone is. He is adamant in his commitment to Veg Out, is proud of its accomplishments and think has the potential to do so much more. According to Rob, the problems he has noticed are limited to things such as turf ward, miscommunication, and the occasional stolen vegetable. He does his best to carry out the visions of Veg Out and not let any negativity impact the positive environment he has helped create.

According to one plot holder, there are some members who choose not to provide their input or expertise and upset the whole positive group dynamics. These people see Veg Out more as “an elite club open to everyone.” More specifically, they like the image it gives to the community, but would prefer that the community stays on the outside looking in, rather than being able to participate themselves.

3.3.6 Management

Veg Out is managed by a volunteer committee. This group of elected individuals consists of, a president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, border patrol, plot monitor, and other positions as needed (Rob Taylor 2005 *Personal Communication*). The plot monitor, in conjunction with the vice president, is in charge of making sure all plots are in tip-top shape. If not, these individuals are responsible for turning the plot over to someone who will maintain it properly. The role of border patrol is fulfilled by an individual who ensures that plot holder's plants are not beyond the boundaries of the allotted space.

Attending their monthly committee meeting and speaking with people who had the “inside scoop” I was able to gain further insight into the management of Veg Out. The president and secretary were especially eager to recognize everyone’s hard work and dedication. They both realised that the success of the garden hinges on the involvement of all of Veg Out’s members. I constantly saw both these committee members working on communal areas of the garden and heard from numerous gardeners that they are two of the most generous and giving of all the ‘Friends.’ Plot holders told me that they liked a garden run with such enthusiastic leaders to serve as role models for everyone else.

A dedicated supporter of Veg Out told me that, while this is technically a volunteer committee, some of its members are paid professional wages for their services. This was further supported when the treasurer gave his monthly report, for although there were figures given he was unable to explain where they came from. He said that some transactions had occurred without being officially recorded. It was if they were unable to account for some of the money that was no longer in their account.

3.4 CERES Community Gardens

3.4.1 Layout of CERES Community Gardens

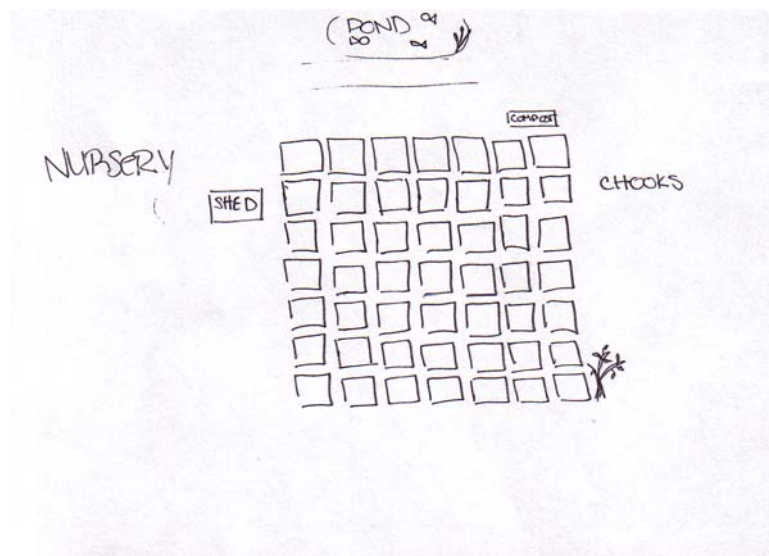


Figure 5. Diagram of CERES Community Gardens

This hand-drawn diagram depicts the community gardens at CERES and the facilities it provides. Each rectangular box represents an individual plot. The areas between these boxes are concrete pathways.

3.4.2 The Background

Information on the background of CERES Community Gardens is very limited. No one who worked for this environmental organization knew much about its formation and beginnings. A sign posted on the outside of the gardens stated that it began as a way for people living in urban settings to have a space set aside for the purpose of growing fresh fruits and vegetables. I was told by Paula Havelberg (2005) *Personal Communication*, that this site was once an old rubbish tip. One of the original plot holders said that he had removed old tires and built the fence around his plot more than twenty years ago. The few knowledgeable people I spoke with emphasized that it was a place with so much potential, which has fallen to the wayside.

3.4.3 A Look Around

The pathways of CERES are covered with tall grasses sprouting up between the uneven concrete blocks. There are weeds around every corner, making it difficult to walk through the grid surrounding the plots (see Figure 6). None of the original blocks are still intact and you would be hard-pressed to find anyone doing anything about it. On an average day, there are no more than a few people working in their plots at a time. No one is socializing or enjoying the company of others. Occasionally there are interested spectators who walk around the perimeter, commenting on the vegetables and the fences around the plots. There is a compost bin in the corner, although there is more rubbish in its contents than green waste. The outside of the shed is falling apart and the inside is filled with a few communal tools.



Figure 6. A Pathway at CERES

3.4.4 The Plots

Although more than 100 people are waiting to get a plot at CERES, those who do have a garden, do not always take care of their space. Many of the plots are filled with weeds rather than vegetables. There are various wooden structures dividing some plots into sections, each for growing a different kind of plant. A vast majority of the plots are surrounded by dishevelled wooden and metal fences with locked gates that have rusted with age (See Figure 7). They are an average of four feet high and prevent anyone from having an easy look into the plots. The gardeners I spoke with who had these fences did so to keep the other plot holders from stealing their vegetables. They genuinely felt that not locking the gate would be a welcome sign to greedy gardeners. There are only two plots without some sort of locked fence. One of them is empty and the other belongs to a new plot holder, Arimbi Winoto who is trying to see what would happen without a fence around her garden. She hates that everyone else around her felt so threatened by their neighbours and wants to change those feelings. She also said that the fences and the weed problem they perpetuated are just plain ugly (Arimbi Winoto 2005 *Personal Communication*).



Figure 7. CERES Plots

3.4.5 The People behind the Plots

I was unable to get to know many of the plot holders at CERES. There were never many people around for me to get to know and ask about their experiences at the gardens. I did find, however, that there were generally two types of people at the garden. Those who had been there since the beginning, an older generation of people, mostly male of European or Asian descent, as well as a younger generation of gardens. The older people had expressed contentment with their situations at the gardens stating that “it is a good place to be.” I met a pair of Maltese brothers who had been gardening at CERES for more than twenty years. Growing up in Malta they were able to learn about farming from their parents and applied that knowledge to their plots. Both of them have another garden at home and enjoy spending lots of time in the outdoors keeping their gardens clean and their vegetables healthy. When I asked them to explain what they thought about the other plot holders, they said they didn’t socialize with anyone else and generally keep to themselves while tending to their gardens.

Arimbi Winoto (2005) *Personal Communication* had just been allocated her plot and is planting her first crop. Having a garden at home and a solid knowledge base on growing food organically, she is optimistic that her plot will be a model for the future of CERES. She is sharing a plot with her friend, Julie, who spent more than eight years on the waiting list. Although happy for this space, they are both greatly disappointed with the negative attitudes of other gardens and overall state of this so-

called community garden. Arimbi told me that she has witnessed other plot holders throwing weeds over the fences into other gardens and even watering the cement as a way to keep their own area clean, totally disrespecting the rights of other plot holders.

3.4.6 Management

Paula Havelberg is currently CERES' Volunteer Community Gardens Coordinator. She spends one day per week on site to fulfil the many roles and responsibilities required by her position (see Appendix G for position description). According to Paula (2005) *Personal Communication*, CERES expects too much out of this volunteer role. She is often frustrated because she can't even begin to get any of her paperwork done in a day, let alone help gardeners out with their plots. There is not enough time for her to monitor the plots and allocate neglected plots to new members. There are many potential changes she would like to see in the gardens, such as the formation of a garden committee and the building of a shelter, but because she is alone in her role, she is unable to get any of these plans off the ground.

Arimbi (2005) *Personal Communication* was also unhappy with the management of her garden. She knows that it is not Paula's fault but rather blames it on CERES for its unwillingness to make it a paid position or put more responsibility in the hands of the gardeners themselves. She too thinks that a garden committee would be able to make some changes and says she would willingly volunteer for that position.

3.5 Nunawading Community Gardens

3.5.1 Layout of Nunawading Community Gardens

This diagram shows the basic layout of Nunawading Community Gardens. The line along the perimeter represents a chain-link fence. The rectangular boxes each represent one plot while the open areas between them are filled with grass. Other facilities and important information is labelled.

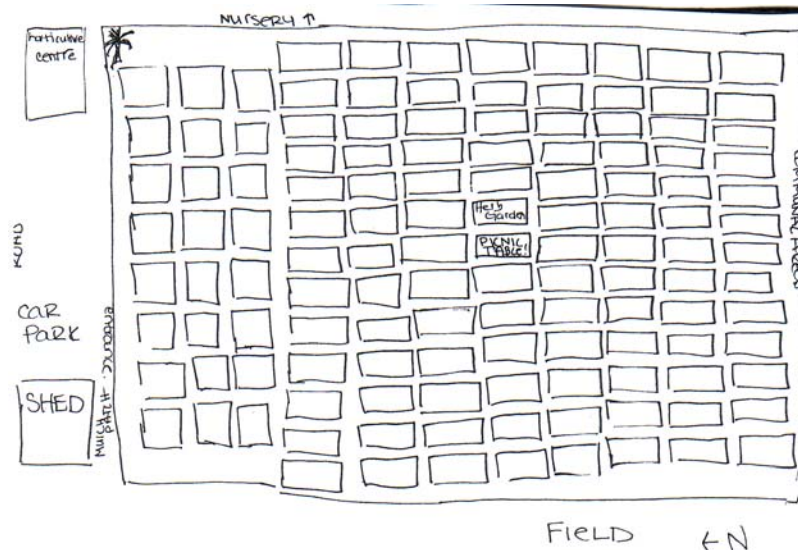


Figure 8. Diagram of NCG

3.5.2 A Background

The original aims set forth by NCG were: “To provide people with an opportunity to share a common interest, to provide economies in the family budget by providing enough land to supply an average family with vegetables for a year, to learn how to garden, and to give flat dwellers opportunities for pleasant & profitable pastime” (Rackham 2002 p. 2). The long-standing members I spoke with all thought that the garden did a good job showing people how to garden and providing a space for socialization, where plot holders are able to share a common interest. They did not think that the original intent to be economically beneficial is still intact as most of the plot holders gardened more of a hobby than to reduce the cost of food. While these gardeners did find spending time at NCG to be very enjoyable, they also had homes and yards of their own and did not rely on the gardens to provide them with an open space.

3.5.3 A Look Around

A stroll through the large expanse of space that makes up this suburban community garden provides a look in to a world where people have a genuine interest in gardening. On a sunny morning many plot holders have walked or driven here to work before it gets too hot. They are weeding the plots, watering their vegetables or sitting down to talk politics with another member of NCG. Around the unlocked fence that encloses the space are fruit trees planted on several of the garden’s anniversaries and communal spaces that people have turned into a second garden. Tomato and bean plants wind their way around the chain link fence. As people come

and go the shed and fence gate open and close regularly. High-volumed conversation is common with the generally retired people who frequent this space. Green is the most common colour around. Plants and leaves overflow from the boundaries of the plots (See Figure 9). I am told that by mid-summer the garden looks like a sea of green. Most of the pathways are kept free of weeds and the grass that covers the ground is moved by a gardener who volunteers his time in exchange for an additional plot. There is an open field to the south, a nursery and horticulture centre to the north and a primary school just out of sight, but the loudspeaker that chimes in intermittently makes its presence known.



Figure 9. Image of plots at NCG

3.5.4. The Plots

The 127 plots at Nunawading's original site are filled with all sorts of plants and expand almost as far as the eye can see. In addition, there are communal plots for growing flowers and herbs. Some of the plots are shared between friends or families, for they are often too large and unmanageable for a single plot holder (Rackham 2005 *Personal Communication*). One member chooses to grow only roses in his space, a fact that brings much joy to other plot holders who are able to admire and smell the many species of roses every time they walk by these flowers. Another plot is filled with birch saplings that will eventually be sold at a local nursery. Structures made of everything from PVC pipes to an old baby crib are used by the numerous gardeners to assist in the growing process. There are only a few spaces over-grown with weeds as most of the plots are well-maintained by their owners. The excess vegetables, fruits,

and herbs grown in this garden are often traded between plot holders or given away to neighbours and friends without a garden of their own.

3.5.5 *The People Behind the Plots*

In the early years of NCG there were a lot of younger families with plots but that has changed a lot as time progressed. The current plot holder is generally older and does not have a family to support. These individuals do not garden out of necessity but see it more as a hobby and pastime; a way to spend time in the outdoors enjoying the company of others (Rackham 2005 *Personal Communication*). A majority of the gardeners speak English but there is an Iranian family and a couple of Greek plot holders unable to communicate with speech. This does not hinder their ability to have a great garden and still be an active member of NCG. They are able to work around this through the use of gestures to keep confrontation at a minimum (Rackham 2005 *Personal Communication*). Overall, they are a very friendly and eager bunch who, while they may not know all their fellow members, enjoy the benefits that NCG has brought to their lives.

Ray, an older Italian gentleman who came to Australia to raise his family more than forty years ago, gained a still-burning passion for gardening in his homeland. He normally walks a few kilometres from his home to the garden two times a day where he spends several hours enjoying the company of his plants and the other gardeners. This year he is trying to grow watermelon in his plot, a feat deemed impossible by fellow plot holders. “I am going to have the biggest watermelons ever. Come back and see in a couple months, they will be huge,” he says with a chuckle and grin that stretches from ear to ear (Ray 2005 *Personal Communication*). Ray takes great pride in his garden and is always willing to share his strawberries and lettuce with those around him (See Figure 10).



Figure 10. Ray Showing off his Freshly Picked Strawberries

Bruce Hannan (2005) *Personal Communication* has had a plot for twelve years and became interested in gardening as a teenager. He and his wife bought a hobby farm where his enthusiasm grew, and shortly after selling it, he put his name down for a plot. He is particularly interested in growing freshly-picked vegetables organically because they help him grow healthier during his on-going battle with cancer. Although Ray wishes he could spend all his free time in the garden, where he has come to know most plot holders, time constraints allow him to come only two or three times per week. If unable to attend working bee, he will volunteer at the garden on his own free time. Overall, Ray is really happy to have joined NCG where he has made new friends and enjoys the social aspects almost as much as the gardening.

3.5.6 Management

As explained in NCG's Rules and By-Laws (1988) the garden is managed by a ten-member committee of volunteers who are elected on an annual basis. The positions in this group include; a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, membership secretary, and general members whose responsibility it is to organise events and compose a seasonal newsletter. Since its inception, there have been 56 members serving on the board, some of whom have resided for almost all of the

twenty-eight years (Rackham 2002). In general, people do not have any complaints about a garden managed in such a way. The committee has three meetings open to all members of NCG. They try to make it a social occasion by having a pot-luck or inviting guest speakers to share their insight into gardening (Rackham 2005 *Personal Communication*).

The few criticisms were that they did not always re-allocate under-used plots in timely fashion and the rules are not always followed. In addition, one committee member complained that it was sometimes hard to get information across to all the members. They post signs and distribute newsletters, but still there are a handful of participants who chose not to listen to the committee's guidelines and recommendations and do not wish to actively contribute to the positive dynamic of NCG.

3.6 Flemington Estate Community Garden

3.6.1 Layout of Flemington Estate Community Garden

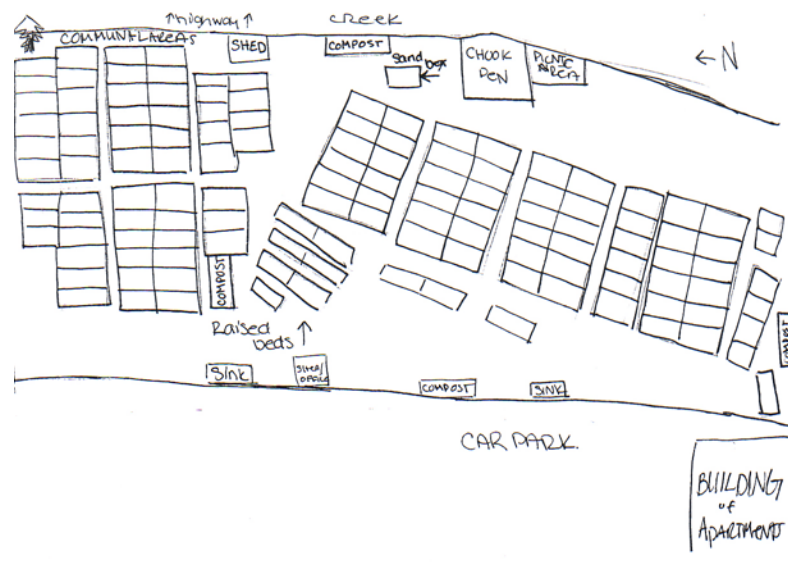


Figure 11. Diagram of Flemington Estate Community Garden

This sketch is based on a diagram provided courtesy of Cultivating Community. It shows the individual plots as rectangular boxes, shown in groups. The raised beds and other specific areas are indicated on the diagram itself.

3.6.2 A Background

Flemington Estate Community Garden is one of nineteen community gardens on public housing estates in Melbourne Victoria (Cultivating Community 2005c). There are more than 750 plots run under the control of a Cultivating Community, a non-profit organization funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services

(DHS), Office of Housing. Cultivating Community works to “Support and promote community gardening, demonstrate the benefits of growing food locally, and to use collaborative process and practices which value the contribution of all” (Cultivating Community 2005b). To meet the increasing demand for resources limited in an urban environment, Cultivating Community believes the answer is to have a community garden in each and every suburb (Cultivating Community 2005b).

Flemington Estate Community Garden came under the control of Cultivating Community after being closed for reservations in 2001 (Cultivating Community 2003). Prior, it was a very run-down mismanaged garden filled with political conflicts and weeds (Jones 2005 *Personal Communication*). Upon closing, the soil, which was the site of an old industrial tannery, was tested and determined to have unsafe levels of formaldehyde. To ensure the health and safety of future gardeners a barrier mat and 600mm of clean soil were placed on top of the environment (Jones 2005 *Personal Communication*). While it reopened in August, Cultivating Community and the CGSWs are still working to build a relationship with Flemington’s gardeners to make it a positive and enjoyable experience for the community.

3.6.3 A Look Around

The site of Flemington Estate is quite different from its immediate surroundings. It is a patch of green in an area surrounded by pavement and high rise apartment buildings. Everything is brand new. New fences, new locks, new seating and new plants. A wood craftsman was hired to create the garden’s many tables and benches. Some of the gardeners come down in the evenings to enjoy dinner under the sheltered picnic area. The chook house made of wattle and daub brick and is the feature building at this new site. There are no chickens yet, but soon they will be laying eggs for the gardeners to enjoy. Four compost bins stationed throughout the garden are available for plot holders to place their green waste which will eventually be given back to them in the form of nutrient-rich mulch. The shed is filled with tools and posters written in the garden’s six major language groups to ensure that everyone is aware of what is happening at Flemington. There are several rubbish bins around for gardeners to throw their waste away. One gardener has taken on the responsibility of making sure they are left out for collection when the CGSWs are unavailable. A locked chain-link fence decorated with the plot holders’ paintings encompasses the garden’s perimeter.

3.6.4 The Plots

Flemington's newly constructed plots are available to residents of public housing estates. They can use the space to grow anything they want, many choose to plant a variety of vegetables and herbs while a few dedicate their plots to only one species. Plastic bags adorn many of the gardens as a way to deter birds from stealing vegetables (see Figure 12). A few of the plot boundaries are raised with short fences and posts and pathways are often built within these spaces. The plots to the north generally have a lot more growing than those to the south. A trend attributed to the fact that the more knowledgeable and active gardeners have plots at the northern end of the gardens. A few spaces remain unallocated, but are quickly being snatched up as second plots by the more eager plot holders.



Figure 12. Plots with Plastic Bags at Flemington

In addition to the traditional plot, Flemington has several raised beds for those who for a variety of reasons would be otherwise unable to garden. There are communal plots along the perimeter filled with flowers, cacti and trees. The care of these plants is the unofficial responsibility of interested gardeners. A few of the plots are used by community organizations and have several people cultivating one plot.

3.6.5 The People Behind the Plots

Flemington's plot holders come from all over the world. Some of them have been in Australia for their entire lives while others arrived just a short time ago. Many have sought refuge from a war-torn homeland and came to Australia to give their children a

better future. There are numerous Vietnamese gardeners who come from a long line of knowledgeable gardeners and use Flemington to pass the tradition on to their children. The African immigrants have often learned about gardening from the years spent at refugee camp. The Turkish gardeners are known as the more defiant and rebellious ethnic group and are often complained about by other gardeners. There may be several generations of gardeners working on a single plot. Those with the ability to grow productive vegetables help out the novice and less experienced of the bunch. Most of the plot holders do not know enough English to carry out a conversation but have come up with others way to communicate. They may rely on a friend as an unofficial translator or use hand signals to express themselves to the CGSWs.

Language is often an issue in the garden as miscommunication leads to boundary disputes and general tension in the garden. The CGSWs said there is a lot of conflict between the different ethnicities of plot holders. The gardeners often complain to the CGSWs about their fellow plot holders. They claim that these people are at fault in many situations, doing everything from stealing soil from an empty plot to throwing rubbish in the compost bins. In an effort to ameliorate some of these problems one CGSW is learning Vietnamese and the other spends time with the women gardeners trying to discuss the situations and possible solutions.

One Eritrean man who came to Australia with his family two years ago says he likes this country because the government lets him have a beautiful garden to grow whatever he pleases. He learned to farm as a child back in Eritrea and was able to grow food to support his family. His English is very clear and he speaks very articulately when say that he is growing corn for the first time in Australia and is excited to see how it goes. Not only does he speak with confidence about his garden, but he is also very eager to discuss many other topics, such as education and politics. The CGSWs say he is a very intelligent man who always has a piece of advice to those willing to listen.

3.6.6 Management

There are two Community Gardens Support Workers who manage the Flemington Estate Community Garden. They are employed by Cultivating Community to spend one day a week at this site working with and for its plot holders. They are responsible for allocating the plots to new gardeners, collecting money for seasonal mulch orders, maintaining the compost, in addition to general upkeep and

keeping the peace at the garden. The CGSWs hold meetings and workshops to educate the plot holders and to update them on the rules and regulations. Translators are present to ensure that everyone is on the same page.

Each time they arrive at the gardens they are bombarded by plot holders looking for help weeding their gardens or for the mulch they ordered the previous week. The plot holders are generally eager to see them and show the CGSWs how quickly their vegetables are growing. Tom and Ailsa, Flemington's CGSWs say that they are never able to accomplish a fraction of what they set out to do at each visit. They spend so much time meeting the needs to gardeners that they are often unable to conduct maintenance work such as cleaning out the shed and turning over the compost.

Ailsa (2005 Personal Communication) says that there is so much more to her role than what is outlined in the job description. Not only does she have to weed the gardens, but she also has to serve as a social worker dealing with problems as they arise. That is not to say that they view their jobs negatively, for they both get a lot of pleasure out of seeing the progress Flemington has made in a few short months. Both Tom and Ailsa hope that some of their control will eventually be turned over to the gardeners to do such things as keep track of the tools and run the chook house.

4.0 Discussion:

4.1 An Impression of the Gardens

Based on all the visual aspects of the gardens, the input of those involved, and my own time at the community gardens, it seems that their differences expand well beyond simple plot structure and management. Each garden gives off an impression and feelings unique to that specific location. This feeling is informed by many factors including; the objectives of each garden, the types of people, their motivation and dedications and activities sponsored by the gardens

4.1.1 Veg Out Community Gardens St. Kilda

This space gave the feeling that it is very much a communal place. I would liken it to a community centre, where gardening may or may not be a component of one's experience. My time spent at the gardens makes me think that Veg Out's emphasis is not so much about growing food to support the family, but about providing this space for socialisation. The people there are always having a good

time, enjoying the company of a fellow 'Friend'. It seems as though the activities sponsored by Veg Out very much promote these feelings.

Almost everyone I spoke with was so grateful and thought every city should have a Veg Out of its own. I feel that Veg Out Community Gardens St. Kilda is very much a model garden for an area that does not necessarily need the gardens to be economically beneficial, but as a space that can do more in other ways to enhance and rebuild an urban area in need of a little creativity and charm.

4.1.2 CERES Community Gardens

This gives off the feeling that it is an individual place for people with the intent of growing vegetables. I did not get the sense that there were really any feelings of community, more of hostility and resentment. I found that many factors contributed to the narrow scope of community and socialization, the most prominent of which was the fences around each plot. Having these structures limited opportunities for socialization. The fences, weeds, and unsightly pathways discouraged anyone from spending anytime at the plots, except for when gardening one's individual plot. It also seems that the locks around the fences and feelings of distrust expressed by some of the gardeners are contradictory to friendship or even making an acquaintance.

These attributes appear to have emerged throughout the entirety of the garden's existence. The gardeners with the locks around their fences were those who have been plot holders for the longest. They were also the ones who had said they did not want to make any friends and claimed that their fellow gardeners stole their vegetables. This older generation of plot holders seems to hinder CERES' ability to transform into more of a 'community' garden rather than a place where people come to plant their seeds. Nonetheless, CERES is a space where city dwellers can grow their vegetables, provided they are willing to face hostility, isolation, and a whole lot of weeds.

4.1.3 Nunawading Community Gardens

The research into Nunawading suggests that it is a fun place for people to garden while also providing opportunities for social interaction. Most of the people I spoke with had a lot of prior experience gardening, as was reflected in the pleasing aesthetics of the garden and willingness to share their knowledge. It is a community place in the sense that people had made friends through their participation. There were strong feelings of solidarity among the well-established individuals who often helped

one another out when a friend was sick or on holiday and could not tend to their plot. Everyone I met was happiest working on their plot and chatting with those nearby. Being Australia's first community garden also provides its members with a sense of pride at what they have accomplished and continue achieve to this day.

4.1.4 Flemington Estate Community Garden

After spending time at Flemington, I am left with the impression that because it is a very new garden, there is a lot of tension in the space. It is still forming its unique identity and will continue this process for some time to come. I think that a majority of the tension and conflict is caused by the language barriers that separate the gardeners from one another and the management.

However, I also think there are a lot of good feelings coming off of this project. Having this space for residents of public housing shows them that people do care and want to enrich the lives of those living in public housing. This is reflected in a lot of the faces of the refugees in the garden, for although most of them struggle to get a few words across; their smiles and vegetables are enough to show their appreciation. In addition, this space has the potential to make a great impact on the lives of those involved. I could not help but feel overjoyed at the look of thanks on an Ethiopian woman's face after helping to weed her plot or of an elderly woman proudly carting her vegetable home for dinner.

4.2 Management

Learning about the different management styles of each of the community gardens, I get the impression that this aspect determines a lot about how the space is perceived and utilised by its participants. This is similar to the findings presented in Bartolomei et. al's study, *A Bountiful Harvest: Community Gardens and Neighbourhood Renewal in Waterloo* (2003). I found that the gardens that I wanted to spend more time in and that I felt a greater connection with were those that I also felt had a more affective system of management. There appears to be a relationship between the type of management at a community garden and its members' happiness with the space. The gardens managed with a greater participation had less conflict among the gardeners, were cleaner, and provided greater feelings of community and friendship.

Allowing for all members to have a role in the management gives the impression of promoting a more welcoming space. When the committee, coordinator or CGSW plans activities aimed at social interaction and community building, they

are more likely to get a positive response from its members; either in the form of a cleaner plot, volunteerism, participation, or friendship. An explanation for the management at each of the gardens can be found in Appendix H.

4.3 *Benefits of the Gardens*

My experiences in these four community gardens suggest that there are many positive aspects of community gardens reaching their members, surrounding communities and natural environment. As found in previous research, community gardens produce many positive outcomes. The main benefits which emerged from my research at the four community gardens are; educational, personal, communal, and environmental. In particular, the environmental and educational benefits of the community gardens under study are parallel to those previously explained by Finnane (2005) while personal benefits generally agree with those previously established by Bartolomei et. al (2003) and Elliott (2003), reinforcing the importance of these spaces to those involved.

However, unlike in Elliot's study, *Growing in the City- Employment and Recreation in Australian City Farms and Community Gardens* (1983) and *A Bountiful Harvest: Community Gardens and Neighbourhood Renewal in Waterloo* (2003) my research does not find these spaces to necessarily be economically beneficial to their members. In order to maintain their plots gardeners have to spend a lot of money not included in their memberships and reduction in food cost was not generally an answer given when I asked people the outcomes of their participation or reasons for having a garden in the first place.

4.3.1 *Educational Benefits*

I learned so much about vegetables, gardening, people, community, and myself from spending such a short time at these community gardens. From the moment I walked into each space, I never stopped learning. These opinions were also reflected in the input provided to me by the gardeners themselves. Even the most avid of the gardeners I spoke to reiterated how you never stop learning in the gardens. Providing this educational base allows people of all ages to continue to learn and grow well beyond the walls of the classroom.

Perhaps the most obvious thing members of all these spaces learned about is gardening, and particularly organic methods of gardening. One thing all gardeners all had in common was their willingness and openness to learning how to grow better vegetables, herbs, and flowers. The members themselves seemed to really enjoy the

teaching and learning all there is to know about gardening. A lot of this type of learning seemed to come with time spent in the garden, tending to one's plot. The people who taught me the most about gardening were also those who spent the most time getting their hands dirty and who had the best looking vegetables.

Based on my observations, education expanded well beyond the topic of gardens. People from many different cultures and ethnic backgrounds had the opportunity to interact and learn about one another's lives and share their experiences. Especially in the case of Flemington Estate Community Gardens, plot holders are able to spend time with people with those whose traditions are quite different from their own. They learn many things about the other parts of the world, including other types of vegetables and languages. It seems that allowing for these interactions and educations is necessary for the further acceptance of other cultures and belief systems which will translate into a greater tolerance for difference in an outside the garden's boundaries.

4.3.2 Personal Benefits

The gardens also really seemed to provide people with a new lease on life. This idea is reflected in the many positive outcomes of participation expressed by plot holders at all four of the gardens under study. Everything from providing fresh vegetables to a gardener with cancer to allowing an elderly member to garden with her raised bed showed me that these spaces do more for people than provide access to gardening. People who would ordinarily spend their days alone in an indoor environment are able to be outside in a pleasant environment. These findings are especially significant to the gardeners who live alone or do not participate in other social activities. Having this space available to them to succeed at growing vegetables and meeting people seemed to boost their confidence and feelings of self-worth.

This positive sense of responsibility and ownership that coincides with plot ownership is one of the most important individual benefits of participation in a community garden. I found that everyone I observed and spoke with whom had a seemingly productive space also had a great sense of pride in the maintenance and condition of their space. Allowing these feelings to develop in the gardens seems very important to these individuals. In the case of Flemington Estate Community Garden and members of other apartment dwellers, this sense of ownership is especially vital. The gardens provide the opportunity for these particular members to

claim possession over a space of land, an action that would otherwise be unavailable to them. To recognize this is to see how significant the community gardens are to those involved.

With the exception of CERES, the community gardens provide a guaranteed space for laughter, sharing, and companionship. This platform for socialisation enhances the lives of the gardeners by allowing them to meet different people, learn new things, and enjoy life in the company of others. The community gardens with more social and communal activities, such as BBQs and fundraisers, were the gardens whose members were most satisfied with their participation.

I found that a relationship also existed between how much effort and time garden members put into these spaces and the extent to which they benefited on a personal level. The more enthusiastic plot holders who spent much of their free time in the garden were those who were also happiest with the results of their participation. These were the people who enjoyed the social aspects of the garden just as much as having a plot to grow vegetables. To realise the advantage that the more dedicated gardeners possess can lead to a more productive and positive community garden for all those involved.

4.3.3 Communal Benefits

Community Gardens are able to improve the perceptions of their surrounding communities. Flemington and all the gardens run by Cultivating Community are able to soften the harsh perceptions of public housing estates and those who resided in these spaces. With Veg Out, CERES, and Nunawading the public is able to come and wander through the gardens, sparking a curiosity and interest in the space, prompting them to find out more. The people I saw strolling around Veg Out taking pictures or enjoying guessing the vegetables planted in the plots shows that while they may not have a plot, the public is also able to enjoy these spaces.

In addition, Flemington Estate Community Garden and Veg Out Community Gardens have plots reserved for the use of outside community organizations. This allows for the gardens to reach out to an expanded audience. It shows members of these often marginalized groups that they too are cared for and about.

4.3.4 Environmental Benefits

Whether or not they actively pursued this goal, all of the community gardens under study were able to improve the environment to some extent. The most obvious example is organic gardening. As stated in the introduction, this method of food

production is able to reduce the release of harmful chemicals and pesticides into the environment. In addition to reducing chemical pollution, the community gardens also helped reduce energy consumption and the emission of green house gases. Having this food available locally means that plot holders do not have to buy food produced and transported from half a world away. This cuts down on the dependence of non-renewable energy, as the product is just a short walk or car ride away from the consumer.

Community gardens can also reduce their impact on the environment by promoting water conservation. Veg Out's partnership with SouthEast Water has allowed it to actively educate the community on ways to reduce water in the garden and at home. The signs posted limiting watering from before 9am and after 3pm have ensured that everyone is aware of their water wise gardening practices. People are able to then transfer this environmental knowledge and awareness into other areas of their lives. While this sounds like an easy thing to do, I only found it to be an obvious benefit at Veg Out Community Gardens St. Kilda. There is so much potential for community gardens to continually work to improve the natural environment.

4.4 Negativity in the Gardens

Studying four very different types of community gardens leads me to believe that there will always be at least a little conflict and negativity that goes along with all the many great aspects of these spaces. Bartolomei et al. (2003) also found this to be true. Plot holders at all of the gardens expressed concern about people stealing things from their plots. It seems like this would really hurt the robbed individual because of months of hard work and dedication are destroyed in a matter of minutes. It has the potential to ruin the sense of community and respect for one another, especially when the suspected culprit is a fellow plot holder. While this may be the case, Veg Out and Nunawading's reaction appears to be a much more level-headed and proactive response to the situation. They recognize that some theft is inevitable, but also hope that the veggie stealer will feel guilty enough not to do it again. Rather than answer to law enforcement, they will have to face a whole community garden full of angry plot holders.

In addition to the loss of vegetables, some level of conflict among plot holders will always be a small part of the community gardens. This appears to be the result of the joining of such a diverse group of people in a small space who are forced to work in close proximity and share resources. It does not, however, have to ruin the

garden's overall dynamic. Those who are interested in speaking badly about another member or working against the grain of the garden can be ignored and not taken seriously by those interested in a positive space.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

Studying distinct qualities of Veg Out Community Gardens St. Kilda, CERES Community Gardens, Nunawading Community Gardens, and Flemington Estate Community Garden allowed me to learn about the many types of community gardens in existence and shown me that there is no such thing as a typical community garden. While they are all designated for the growing of plants, each is a very special place whose many components and people give it a distinct feeling. They cater to a wide range of individuals whose personalities and backgrounds are as unique as the places they frequent. These individuals have the opportunity to make community gardens as large a part of their lives as they desire, but those who devote more time than others also get the most out of their participation. The results of this study clarify its initial aims, demonstrating that each community garden started for its own reasons; each with specific visions and goals which have been transformed by its management as well as its members' attitudes and behaviours. While there are examples of negativity in each of the gardens, plot holders have many motivations for their continued involvement including the friendship, food, and enjoyment it offers. Community gardens provide their members with fresh produce and knowledge, allow for socialization, and work to improve the environment.

5.2 A Successful Community Garden

Successful and productive community gardens are important components of the urban landscape. They are able to have such a positive impact utilising only a small fraction of a city's space. Unfortunately, there are currently not enough community gardens to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding urban population. As greater numbers of people leave behind open space in exchange for the built environment, there needs to be a dramatic increase in the number of community gardens, not only in Melbourne but on a national and international level.

While there is no blueprint for differentiating between a successful and unsuccessful community garden, many factors contribute to a well-functioning, productive garden, viewed by its members as a pleasant and enjoyable place to spend

time. The overall perceived effectiveness of a community garden is contingent upon the enthusiastic and committed participation of its members. To have a flourishing community garden that fosters companionship and a sense of pride, the members must be dedicated individuals who are able to contribute their time, knowledge, and hard work.

It can not be managed by a separate governing body, as this leads to conflict and negativity, but must be run by its members and for its members. The management should be a volunteer committee of plot holders who are elected to meet the needs and desires of the rest of the members. Their responsibility is to constantly work to improve the garden for everyone involved. They need to hold public meetings so everyone has a fair chance to voice their concerns and provide their input.

In addition, a community garden should be place that nourishes its plot holders along with the surrounding community. It must encourage the public to learn about the garden and work to include as many people as possible. This is done by leaving the plots unlocked in the day and allowing community organizations to have gardens of their own. There need to be several communal areas so that those on the waiting list for a plot can still feel a part of something important.

As far as layout and facilities of the garden is concerned, there must be raised plots to serve those in need. The general plots should be no larger than 2.2m x 4m so they can be easily maintained by plot holders. Fences are not allowed around individual plots. To prevent the on-set of weeds, pathways ought to be made grass or covered in wood chips. A sheltered table and picnic areas must be scattered throughout, encouraging gardeners to spend free time socialising with other members. There also should be a sizeable shed, big enough to place communal tools and hoses with rules clearly posted on the walls in all the language groups represented in the garden.

They must also work to improve the natural environment. This can be done by having well-maintained compost bins and emphasizing organic gardening and water conservation. The garden can serve as a model for environmental remediation in the unlikeliest of places, a city.

Finally, a successful community garden must have a vision and always be open to change. It must constantly re-evaluate its current state and work to improve the space for all its members, the environment and community at large. It should always strive to be better and continue to serves its members, creating happy and

healthy urban citizens. Following these guidelines allows a community garden to reach out to many people and make a valuable contribution to the urban environment.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Study

This study took a broad case study approach to learn about community gardens. I found this to be an effective method, however, given time constraints; I was only able to research four out of more than 600 in Australia and 50 in Melbourne alone (Rackham 2002). This greatly limited the scope of my results. To learn even more about the different types of community gardens, I suggest that an additional study be conducted over a much longer time period. It will be able to delve deeper into community gardens by researching a much greater number, possibly all of those in Melbourne or a sampling for gardens from all around Australia. This would increase the awareness of community gardens and encourage more people to create or participate in them. It would also provide current community gardens with new ideas and show them ways they can improve. I also feel that it would also be valuable to focus more particularly on a single aspect of community gardening, such as management, at several locations. This would offer a more comprehensive understanding of a specific component. It would create a resource, allowing new and current gardens to use it as a guide when reassessing and creating management strategies of their own.

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